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ABSTRACT

Kindergarten Plus, a program for disabled and non-disabled kindergarten students in an integrated classroom setting, was implemented in 5 New York City classrooms serving 99 kindergartners. The program's implementation and student outcomes were evaluated at the end of the first year. Classroom observation and staff interviews revealed that the Kindergarten Plus program provided a developmentally appropriate learning environment that encouraged children's language, cognitive abilities, social skills, and emotional development. Teachers used an appropriate balance of small-group, individualized, and whole-group instruction, and a variety of child-directed and teacher-guided activities. Teachers also used English as a Second Language (ESL) and multicultural strategies and materials in the classroom, and participating ESL students showed substantial gains in English language proficiency. The high ratio of classroom staff to children allowed for more individualized attention to children, but also necessitated the use of team teaching and increased staff communication. A comparison of the Kindergarten Plus average attendance rate with the city-wide attendance rates revealed only minor differences. Program staff participated in a variety of staff development workshops and cited those on multicultural education, staff collaboration, and instructional strategies for integrated instruction as being most helpful. Parent workshops were offered at all of the Kindergarten Plus sites. Teachers gave high praise to the Kindergarten Plus program and maintained that the integrated setting helped both general education and special education children to work together and to respect similarities and differences in one another. (TJQ)

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OER Report

KINDERGARTEN PLUS
1992-93

PHASE II FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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KINDERGARTEN PLUS
PHASE II FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
1992-93

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kindergarten Plus, a program for disabled and non-disabled kindergarten students in an integrated classroom setting, was in its first year in 1992-93. The program functioned in five classrooms in four schools and served 99 kindergartners.

The Office of Educational Research's (OER's) Phase I report of the 1992-93 Kindergarten Plus Program, completed in August 1993, presented an evaluation of (a) student demographics, including type of disabling condition and services rendered to special education student participants; (b) Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.s) for special education participants as compared to students in self-contained special education classes; (c) the rate of reclassification (including decertification) of special education student participants as compared to students in self-contained special education classes; and (d) the average rate of attendance for Kindergarten Plus participants. This Phase II final report presents an evaluation of program implementation and student outcomes.

OREA consultants' observations of Kindergarten Plus classrooms and interviews with program staff revealed that the Kindergarten Plus program provided a developmentally-appropriate learning environment that encouraged children's language, cognitive abilities, social skills, and emotional development. Teachers used an appropriate balance of small-group, individualized, and whole-group instruction and a variety of both child-directed and teacher-guided activities. Teachers also used E.S.L. and multicultural strategies and materials in the classrooms; they expressed a need for additional staff development and age-appropriate materials in these areas. The higher ratio of classroom staff to children allowed for more individualized attention to children but also necessitated the use of team teaching and increased staff communication. To encourage continuity and coordination across grade levels, the program staff employed a variety of strategies, including intervisitation and coordination of school activities.

Participating E.S.L. students' showed substantial gains in English language proficiency. Due to the small number of paired scores, however, it was not possible to establish statistical significance. The average attendance rate for Kindergarten Plus students compared to citywide average attendance rates showed only minor differences.

Program staff participated in a variety of staff development workshops and cited those on multicultural education, staff collaboration, and instructional strategies for integrated instruction as being most helpful. They recommended that future

workshops address such topics as team building, parent involvement, and multicultural education.

To address the needs of participating families, parent workshops were offered at all of the Kindergarten Plus sites.

Teachers gave high praise to the Kindergarten Plus program and maintained that the integrated setting helped both general education and special education children to work together and to respect similarities and differences in one another.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, OREA made the following recommendations to the program:

Administrative

- Arrange for common prep periods for the program staff to enhance communication and collaboration.
- Provide a separate support team (or add members to existing support teams) to serve Kindergarten Plus classrooms and parents exclusively.

Curriculum

- Provide more bilingual and multicultural materials.
- Provide more bilingual staff.

Staff Development

- Offer staff development that focuses on team-building and staff communication, multicultural education, behavior management techniques, instructional practices for an integrated classroom, and strategies for involving and relating to parents.
- Offer follow-up of workshop topics.
- Allot more time for informal instruction among staff during workshops.

Parental Activities

- Develop and maintain strategies to increase parent involvement with a particular focus on parents of special education students, as these families are most likely to reside outside of the school's zone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been prepared by the Bilingual, Multicultural, and Early Childhood Evaluation Unit of the Office of Educational Research.

Additional copies of this report are available from:

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I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1992-93, the Board of Education of the City of New York introduced Kindergarten Plus, a program that provided services to disabled and nondisabled kindergartners together in the same classroom setting. Until 1992, such integrated services were offered only to prekindergarten children (the SuperStart Plus program). The rationale for both integrated programs rests on research findings that identify integration of very young disabled and general education students as a crucial factor in reducing referrals to special education and increasing the rate of decertification of students already in special education classes.

Like SuperStart Plus, Kindergarten Plus offered participants a comprehensive program of instruction and health, nutrition, and social services. Staff development and parent involvement were also offered. The curriculum was designed to provide a developmentally-appropriate learning environment to enhance kindergarten students' language as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. To foster cultural awareness and to build self-esteem, multicultural education was integrated into the curriculum. Bilingual/English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) services were offered where appropriate.

Program Design

Four schools, each in a different community school district (C.S.D.), offered the Kindergarten Plus program in 1992-93. Three of four sites offered one Kindergarten Plus class, while the remaining site had two. All of the Kindergarten Plus classrooms offered full-day integrated sessions.

Each Kindergarten Plus classroom was staffed by two teachers (one general education and one special education) and one special education paraprofessional. The program design called for the use of family assistants and social workers to provide outreach and case management services to participating families when funds were available. Prekindergarten specialists in the SuperStart and SuperStart Plus programs at the Kindergarten Plus sites assisted when time permitted.

EVALUATION DESIGN

Sample

For the 1992-93 program evaluation, consultants from the Office of Educational Research (OER) visited all five of the Kindergarten Plus classrooms. A total of ten classroom teachers, five educational paraprofessionals, four prekindergarten specialists, four family workers, four social workers, one parent, and ninety-five students participated in the evaluation. A sample of general education and special education nonparticipants served as comparison groups.

Data Collection

Trained OER evaluation consultants conducted interviews with program staff and parents and observed classroom implementation. To assess participating students' progress, OER analyzed and evaluated participating E.S.L. students' pre- and posttest scores on the listening/speaking subtest of the Language Assessment Battery (LAB). Since those participants for whom paired LAB scores were available were all in general education, OER selected a comparison group of non-participating E.S.L. students. OER also compared the attendance rate for participants as

compared to the citywide average attendance rates for general education and special education nonparticipants.

In the year under review, no evaluation instrument was available to measure the developmental progress of participating students. OER, therefore, conducted extensive consultations with early childhood experts to develop an early childhood checklist for kindergarten-age children. This checklist will be piloted in the 1993-94 academic year in a representative sample of schools, and resultant data will be analyzed and presented in the 1993-94 evaluation report.

REPORT FORMAT

The data collected during the 1992-93 Kindergarten Plus program evaluation were analyzed and documented in two phases. The Phase I report, which was completed in August 1993, presented an evaluation of (a) student demographics, including type of disabling condition and services rendered to special education student participants; (b) Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.s) for special education participants as compared to students in self-contained special education classes; (c) the rate of reclassification (including decertification) of special education student participants as compared to students in self-contained special education classes; and (d) the average rate of attendance for Kindergarten Plus participants.

This Phase II report presents an evaluation of program implementation and student outcomes.

II. FINDINGS

THE CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In its position statement on early childhood education, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) asserted that developmentally-appropriate activities should be organized around learning centers, be experience-oriented and interactive, and should take place in small-group or individual settings (Bredekamp, 1987). Children in inclusionary classrooms should be integrated for all activities (Froschl, Colón, Rubin, & Sprung, 1984).

OER evaluation consultants observed these principles of developmentally-appropriate practices in operation in the five Kindergarten Plus classrooms they visited. All five had discrete learning centers for arts and crafts, dramatic play, block building, manipulatives, and science. There were clusters of separate work tables, and an area for whole-group meetings. Three classrooms had a library and a listening center and two had a water or sand table and a gross motor area.

All of the classrooms were amply supplied with books, blocks, small manipulatives, an experience chart, and self-portraits of the children. Teachers in all of the classrooms kept portfolios of the children's work. Children were familiar with and able to follow classroom routines (e.g., using the attendance chart) and explore the learning centers freely.

Evaluation consultants observed a variety of both child-directed and teacher-guided activities in all of the classrooms. Self-directed activities included housekeeping, looking at books, and using blocks and Legos. Teacher-directed

activities included planting seeds, storytelling and discussion, and art projects that involved pasting and stapling.

All classrooms had whole-group meeting time. Teachers discussed the day's schedule and the attendance, read aloud, and fostered whole-group discussions. With only a few exceptions, all of the students participated. The exceptions included an autistic child who left the classroom and took a walk with the paraprofessional, a special education child who was finishing his breakfast, and two general education children who were disruptive and had to be removed from the group.

OER consultants observed that the children made smooth transitions from one activity to the next. Teachers in each of the classrooms gave advanced notice of when it was time to stop one activity and get ready for the next. All of the classroom schedules allowed sufficient time for completion and cleanup of activities.

OER consultants also observed the lunch period for all Kindergarten Plus classes. Four of the five classes ate in the classroom; the fifth class ate in the school cafeteria. Children helped out during mealtime (e.g., passed out utensils and milk) in three of the four classrooms. Children socialized with peers and adults and cleaned up as part of their daily lunch routine.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

OER consultants observed teachers engaging in developmentally-appropriate practices that fostered children's language as well as the cognitive abilities, social development, and self-regulation capability.

Language Development

Teachers encouraged language development by creating opportunities for children to participate verbally in whole-group discussions and storytelling. Consultants observed storytelling time in all of the classrooms; children listened attentively and responded to the teachers' questions.

Teachers extended children's language by asking open-ended questions and by incorporating the children's suggestions into ongoing discussions. For example, the OER consultants observed a group viewing of a video on insects that led to children asking questions about caterpillars and dragonflies and whether the class could take a trip to the park to catch butterflies. In another observed classroom, one child asked if he could share a story with the group, and this evolved into several children taking turns to share a story.

In addition to the whole-group activities, various learning centers supported the children's language and literacy development. During center time, OER consultants observed the children expressing themselves verbally through dramatic play, "reading through" books, and using alphabet and matching games as well as other language activities. The teachers encouraged the children to comment on what they were doing as they went along.

When asked about children's language development since the beginning of the program, teachers stated that the children showed greater motivation for learning and reading as evidenced by their increased participation in class discussion and

requests for stories as the year progressed. The majority of the teachers also reported the children were talking more and were better able to express themselves.

English as a Second Language (E.S.L.)

For those children whose native language was not English, the Kindergarten Plus program integrated English as a second language (E.S.L.) services into the curriculum. The teachers and paraprofessionals reported using a variety of activities and strategies to foster language development in these children, including visual aids, audiotapes, repetition, translation, modeling, and activities that involved the senses. Teachers indicated that additional bilingual staff and materials would help them implement this aspect of the curriculum more effectively.

Cognitive Development

Kindergarten Plus teachers used a variety of activities, including puzzles, blocks, and arts and crafts projects to foster the development of children's cognitive abilities. They used a variety of mathematics and science activities to encourage the development of problem-solving skills. During a finger painting activity, for example, one teacher asked, "What color do you get when you mix blue and yellow?" and guided the students in answering the question.

In all classrooms, OER consultants observed children engaged in activities that involved comparing, measuring, sorting, and grouping objects. In one classroom, children measured dirt for planting grass seeds and sorted pictures of insects; in another classroom, children sorted and arranged rocks in their science center. Children also engaged in counting activities during both whole-group and small-

group instruction. In one classroom, the teacher conducted a mathematics lesson based on the number of children who were present and absent that day. In another classroom, the children counted aloud as the teacher posted felt numbers on a board.

Multicultural Instruction

To help children learn about their own and other cultures, and to build their self-esteem, the Kindergarten Plus program stressed multicultural instruction. OER consultants observed multicultural materials displayed in three of the five classrooms. For example, one classroom displayed a project entitled "Shades of the Rainbow," which consisted of self-portraits of the children, and another classroom stocked its housekeeping center with multicultural dolls, puppets, costumes, and foods.

Teachers stated that they used a variety of activities to promote multicultural awareness. These included celebrating holidays, making foods representative of different nations, reading books with a multicultural theme, sharing stories of family backgrounds, and singing songs of a number of cultures. To foster self-awareness and self-esteem, teachers in one classroom helped the children make three-dimensional life-size dolls of themselves. In another classroom, teachers read stories and made representative foods of a different country every month. Most teachers stated that they would like more age-appropriate multicultural materials to help them implement this aspect of the curriculum more effectively.

CLASSROOM GROUPING PATTERNS

OER consultants observed Kindergarten Plus teachers using small-group and individualized instruction as well as some whole-class grouping. In all of the classrooms, children worked cooperatively, sharing and taking turns. The teachers stated that the children were able to discuss conflicts, play together, learn from one another, and show acceptance of others. If a dispute arose, teachers used such strategies as peer negotiation, modeling, role playing, and time-outs to resolve the conflict.

Both general education and special education children were fully integrated in all classroom activities, with only a few exceptions. In one classroom, an autistic child was observed working by himself in the block area until an adult joined him. In another classroom, a special education child worked one-on-one with his assigned paraprofessional.

The majority of teachers maintained that the general education and special education children interacted in positive ways and learned to respect differences and appreciate similarities in one another. One teacher reported that in the beginning of the year, some of the general education children were hesitant about approaching the special education children but that increased exposure made the children more comfortable with and more accepting of one another. Another teacher reported that the general education children sometimes treated the special education children like younger siblings, but again, with increased exposure, these children learned to relate to one another as peers.

Pull-Out Services for Special Education Children

OER consultants observed special education children receiving pull-out services in four of the five classrooms. Pull-out services included counseling, speech, and physical therapy.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development was an important component of the Kindergarten Plus program. Workshops focused on a variety of topics, including adapting instruction to individual children's needs, team-building, staff collaboration, using multicultural strategies, and working with parents.

When asked which workshops they found most helpful, the teachers and paraprofessionals most frequently cited those on multicultural education, cooperative learning, alternative assessment techniques, and issues regarding special education.

The prekindergarten specialists stated that they reinforced staff development workshops by working one-on-one with staff members.

Topics for Future Staff Development

OER field consultants asked the staff which topics they would like addressed in future workshops. The teachers and paraprofessionals reported that they would like workshop topics to focus on multicultural education, behavior management, instructional practices for an integrated classroom, and strategies for relating to parents. Teachers also stated that they would like to have more opportunities for interaction and discussion with other workshop participants and more follow-up of individual topics.

STAFF COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

OER consultants interviewed Kindergarten Plus staff to determine how team teaching and staff communication were implemented at the different sites. Teachers in four of the classes stated that they met with their co-teacher on a daily basis to plan curriculum and discuss the children and they also had sufficient time to meet with program support staff, such as the prekindergarten specialist and family worker, as needed. The two teachers in the fifth class stated that they met with their co-teachers on a weekly basis but found it difficult to meet with the support personnel. They explained that the prekindergarten specialist and family worker at their site were specifically assigned to SuperStart and SuperStart Plus and had little time left over to assist the Kindergarten Plus staff.

CONTINUITY ACROSS GRADE LEVELS

To encourage continuity of the learning process across grade levels, a tenet of early childhood education, Kindergarten Plus teachers reported that they shared activities such as field trips and auditorium performances with SuperStart Plus teachers and students. Teachers also stated that they visited Kindergarten Plus programs at other schools to see classes in operation and to share ideas with other teachers.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

The parent component of the program was designed to offer comprehensive parent outreach and support services to families of participating children. Family

workers reported that prekindergarten specialists and social workers assisted them in planning the parent involvement component of the program. The participating sites offered parents a variety of workshops, opportunities to volunteer in the classroom, and social services, including home visits.

Parent Workshops

All of the participating schools offered workshops for parents. Many of the workshops built bridges between home and school by offering topics and activities that encouraged parents and children to learn together at home. Other workshop topics focused on how preschoolers learn, nutrition, women's health, myths and facts about special education, and developing computer skills. One school offered E.S.L. classes to parents.

The majority of the Kindergarten Plus staff, however, stated that they had little contact with parents. Most of the staff saw the parents only during pick-up or drop-off times, although contact was more extensive if parents went on trips or volunteered to help out in the school. Staff indicated that parents of special education children typically had less contact with the school than did the parents of general education children. This may have been because many lived at a distance—their children were bused in but transportation was more difficult for families.

Home Visits/Social Services

The majority of family workers made home visits. Some family workers reported difficulty in making these visits, citing safety issues or resistance from parents as obstacles. In addition to making home visits, family workers made

referrals to appropriate community agencies, assisted parents with medical documents, and offered health information (e.g., dangers of lead poisoning from ingesting flaking lead-based paint).

STUDENT OUTCOMES

In contrasting the achievements of Kindergarten Plus participants with those of comparison groups, OER examined LAB scores and attendance rates.

English Language Development

To assess growth in English proficiency, OER consultants analyzed participating E.S.L. students' pre- and posttest scores on the listening/speaking subtest of the LAB. Paired scores were available only for general education participants, so OER selected as a comparison group non-participating general education students. The findings are presented in Table 1. E.S.L. students' with matching pre- and posttest LAB scores showed a substantial gain in English proficiency. Due to the small number of paired scores, however, it was not possible to establish statistical significance. A comparison of the pre- and posttest LAB scores for the selected nonparticipants revealed a smaller but statistically significant ($p < .05$) gain.

Attendance

For the 1992-93 program year, the average rate of attendance for Kindergarten Plus participants was 84 percent. This was similar to the 1992-93 citywide average of 86 percent for general education kindergarten and 83 percent for special education kindergarten student.

TABLE 1

Mean Pretest/Posttest Gains on the Listening/Speaking Subtest of the LAB

	Number of Students	Students Tested	<u>Pretest</u>		<u>Posttest</u>		<u>Difference</u>		t-value
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Kindergarten Plus Participants	95	7	38.86	32.42	56.00	26.33	17.14	45.42	1.00
General Education Nonparticipants	195	91	20.62	20.06	26.69	20.48	6.08	19.19	3.02*

- The number of Kindergarten Plus students tested was too small to show significance.

STAFF'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAM'S STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Teachers stated that both special education and general education children benefited from the integrated learning environment. Although they found that the integrated classroom at times called for greater patience and tolerance on the part of both teachers and students, they felt the special education children progressed faster and developed greater self-confidence than they would have in a self-contained nonintegrated classroom. Teachers asserted that the program helped both the general education and the special education children to learn to respect one another's differences. Some of the teachers reported that the additional staff present in the classroom (i.e., two teachers and one educational paraprofessional) allowed them to provide more individualized instruction, and the common prep period facilitated team building.

At the same time, they cited team teaching, staff communication, and collaboration as the most challenging aspects of the program. The prekindergarten specialists also cited the lack of a separate Kindergarten Plus support staff (kindergarten specialist, social worker, and family worker) as an obstacle.

When asked about any difficulties they had experienced in an integrated classroom, teachers' responses varied. Two teachers reported that they had no real difficulties. Another teacher stated that she found some of the general education children's behavior more problematic than that of the special education children. Three teachers stated that the special education children sometimes required more individualized teaching strategies than they were already being given. Another

teacher felt that parents needed more education about special education and inclusionary classrooms.

A majority of the staff stated that they would like workshops on staff collaboration, team building, recruiting and relating to parents, and more topics in multicultural education. They also wanted more opportunities for informal discussion with other workshop participants, weekly staff meetings, and common prep periods. The staff also recommended having a social worker available on a four- or five-day basis to assist families. They also suggested that one or two active parent participants might be recruited to organize other parents.

The physical conditions of the classroom and/or school were less than perfect, according to most staff members. The problems staff cited included the lack of a cafeteria, insufficient classroom space, lack of accessible classrooms (i.e., ground floor level), inadequate bathroom facilities, and a dearth of gyms or playground facilities.

III. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OER consultants' observations and interviews with program staff revealed that Kindergarten Plus program provided a developmentally-appropriate learning environment that encouraged children's language and cognitive abilities, social skills, and emotional development. Teachers used an appropriate balance of small-group, individualized, and whole-group instruction and a variety of both child-directed and teacher-guided activities. Teachers also used E.S.L. and multicultural strategies and materials in the classrooms; however, they expressed a need for additional staff development and age-appropriate materials in these areas.

OER assessed English language proficiency in participating E.S.L. students as compared to general education nonparticipants. Pretest to posttest LAB scores showed a substantial gain for participants. Due to the small number of paired scores, however, it was not possible to establish statistical significance, whereas gain for nonparticipants were smaller but statistically significant ($p < .05$).

An examination of the average attendance rate of Kindergarten Plus students revealed only minor differences as compared to citywide average attendance rates for general education and special education nonparticipants.

Program staff participated in a variety of staff development workshops and cited those on multicultural education, staff collaboration, and strategies for integrated instruction as being most helpful. They recommended that future workshops address team building, parent involvement, and topics in multicultural education.

Teachers gave high praise to the Kindergarten Plus program and maintained that the integrated setting taught both general education and special education children to work together and to respect the similarities and differences in one another. The additional classroom staff provided by Kindergarten Plus allowed teachers to provide more individualized attention to children but also necessitated the use of team-teaching and enhanced staff communication.

To encourage continuity and coordination across grade levels, the program staff employed a variety of strategies, including intervisitation and coordination of school activities. To address the needs of the participating families, parent workshops were offered at all of the Kindergarten Plus sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Administrative

- Arrange for common prep periods for the program staff to enhance communication and collaboration.
- Provide a separate support team (or add members to existing support teams) to serve Kindergarten Plus classrooms and parents exclusively.

Curriculum

- Provide more bilingual and multicultural materials.
- Provide more bilingual staff.

Staff Development

- Offer staff development that focuses on team building and staff communication, multicultural education, behavior management techniques, instructional practices for an integrated classroom, and strategies for involving and relating to parents.

- Offer follow-up of workshop topics.
- Allot more time for informal interaction among staff during workshops.

Parental Activities

- Develop and maintain strategies to increase parent involvement with a particular focus on parents of special education students, as these families are most likely to reside outside of the school's zone.

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